Obama-Appointed Ambassador and 'America's Chaplain' Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook Talks Faith, Politics and 'Silent No More'

As midterms heat up, the former U.S. Ambassador and first female NYPD chaplain brings new documentary and Global Black Women of Faith Celebration in Harlem



Ambassador Rev Dr Suzan Johnson Cook

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, September 29, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- Is the pulpit one of America's leadership spaces still struggling to fully see women in power?

Obama-appointed former U.S. Ambassador Rev. Dr. Suzan "Sujay" Johnson Cook, known as "America's Chaplain," has spent 45 years at the intersection of faith, leadership and public life while breaking barriers herself. Before President Barack Obama appointed her U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Johnson Cook served 21 years as an NYPD chaplain and made history as its first female chaplain. She also became the first woman elected president of the historic Hampton University Ministers' Conference.

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>
> *Rev. Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook*

Now, as the 2026 midterm elections heat up and America marks 25 years since the September 11 attacks, Johnson Cook is bringing a national conversation about Black women, faith, leadership and power to the screen with the October 15 premiere of Silent No More: The R.E.A.L. BWIM Story in Harlem.

The documentary captures Black women ministers telling their own stories of calling, rejection, isolation, advancement, mentorship and sisterhood. One minister says she ran from her calling

for approximately 20 years because she did not want to face “the woman question.” Others recall being rejected or not recognized as preachers because they were women.

The stories reflect a world Johnson Cook knows firsthand. When she answered her own call to ministry more than four decades ago, women faced significant barriers to being recognized as ministers.

“Many women said that they had to preach from the floor if they were invited to preach at all. Many were really put down and ostracized,” Johnson Cook recalls.



Global Black Women of Faith Celebration Dr Suzan Johnson Cook

Her experience was different in one critical way: influential male ministers supported her, signed her ordination certificate, attended her installation and helped open doors often closed to women.

“I understand many people opened doors for me. Yes, we say God opens doors and that is true, but people open doors too,” Johnson Cook says in Silent No More. “Yes, I’m a trailblazer, but you blaze the trail so that others can walk on it.”

That belief led Johnson Cook to create the R.E.A.L. Black Women in Ministry Initiative, connecting established Black women ministers with emerging leaders through mentorship, professional development and access. Women featured in the documentary describe moving from isolation to sisterhood and from mentees to mentors, while some who once questioned whether they would ever pastor are now leading congregations.

Johnson Cook’s commitment to opening doors is part of a larger philosophy she calls “Faith on the Front Lines.” Her own front lines have stretched from Harlem pulpits to Ground Zero, the White House and global diplomacy.

As an NYPD chaplain, Johnson Cook was called to Ground Zero on September 11, 2001. She spent the weeks that followed supporting first responders and families through rescue, recovery and funerals. She recalls exhausted firefighters asking her simply to pray for them and, after weeks of holding others together, eventually pulling her own car over and crying. The experience sharpened a question that continues to inform her work around soul care: Who cares for the

person caring for everybody else?

This September, Johnson Cook reflected on her Ground Zero experience and the shared humanity she witnessed after the attacks in her ESSENCE op-ed, “Twenty-Five Years Later: What 9/11 Taught Me About America As A Black Woman.”

Her work on the front lines later expanded globally. As U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Johnson Cook served as a principal adviser to the President and Secretary of State on religious freedom worldwide.

That experience gives “America’s Chaplain” a distinctive perspective as the November 2026 midterms approach. Johnson Cook can speak to the intersection of faith and civic life, including how religious beliefs shape values and civic engagement, drawing on decades of experience across faith traditions and political institutions. Earlier this year, she joined Rabbi Angela Buchdahl on CNN’s One World for a conversation about faith, hope and finding common ground across religious differences.

Silent No More: The R.E.A.L. BWIM Story premieres Thursday, October 15 at Canaan Baptist Church of Christ, 132 W. 116th Street in Harlem, as part of the October 15–16 Global Black Women of Faith Celebration. The celebration concludes October 16 with the TUSH Trailblazers & Unsung She-Roes Awards and Community Champions Gala at the Alhambra Ballroom.

For Johnson Cook, bringing the documentary to Harlem is also a homecoming. Born in Harlem and raised in Harlem and the Bronx, she is the daughter of Southern sharecroppers who migrated north, became civil servants and built a family business. Her path ultimately stretched from Harlem to Ground Zero, the White House and the global stage.

“If we don’t tell our history, it will be lost,” Johnson Cook says in Silent No More. “If we don’t document who we are, no one will ever know that we were there.”

AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS

Rev. Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook is available for interviews and commentary on:

Women and religious leadership: Breaking the stained-glass ceiling and why Black women continue to face barriers to the pulpit, leadership and power

Faith in politically charged times: How faith leaders can engage communities, bridge differences and lead without turning the pulpit into partisan advocacy

Faith and voting: How faith, values and religious identity can shape civic engagement and the issues voters consider as the 2026 midterms approach

Faith on the Front Lines: What Ground Zero, the NYPD and global diplomacy taught her about showing up during crisis

25 years after 9/11: What America learned about faith, race, humanity and common ground

Religious freedom and interfaith leadership: Lessons from serving as U.S. Ambassador-at-Large and building relationships across religious differences

Women, mentorship and sponsorship: Why opening doors matters as much as offering advice

Soul care: Who cares for leaders, clergy and caregivers responsible for carrying everyone else?

Silent No More: The Black women behind the documentary and why preserving their history matters now

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